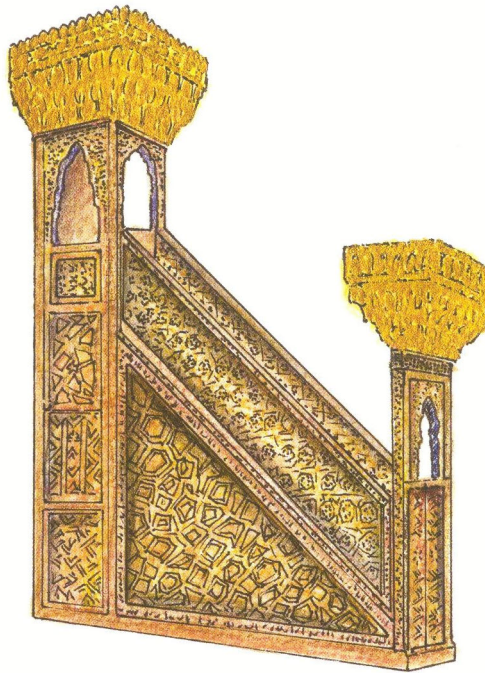


The Most Beautiful MINBAR



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INTRODUCTION

Jerusalem -- or *Bayt al-Muqaddas* (the 'Sacred House') -- has been important to Muslims since the early days of Islam. Both the Noble Qur'an and authentic *hadith* make reference to the Holy City.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was transported from Makkah to Jerusalem from where he ascended to the Seven Heavens. These events, known as *Al-'Isra'* and *Al-Mi'raj*, feature in the following *ayah*.

Glory to Allah who did take His servant for a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque [in Makkah] to the Al-Aqsa [in Jerusalem, *Al-Quds*] whose precincts We did bless. (*Al-'Isra'*: 1)

And in a well-known *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ clarified the importance of Jerusalem.

The Prophet ﷺ was once asked by a woman: 'O *Rasul Allah*! Give us a ruling as to Jerusalem (*Al-Quds*).' And he said: 'It is the land of the Resurrection and the Judgement assembly. For indeed a prayer there is worth a thousand elsewhere.'

Bayt Al-Muqaddas is also the only place on Earth where all the Prophets of Allah ﷺ performed *salah* (ritual prayer) in congregation.

With just one exception, Muslims have been the custodians of the Holy City for the past 1,300 years. In the long history of Jerusalem, two exemplary instances of tolerance need repeating. In both cases, Muslims exhibited restraint, kindness and compassion towards those defeated. First, in 638 CE, after the Caliph 'Umar ؓ had peacefully entered Jerusalem on foot, all inhabitants of the city were given protection and the freedom of worship. In 1099 CE, however, Jerusalem fell to the invading *Franji*, or 'Franks' (Catholic crusaders from Western Europe) who showed no mercy whatsoever to its Muslim, Jewish, or even Orthodox Christian inhabitants. Many were burned or slaughtered in their places of worship. But almost ninety years later, in 1187 CE, Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi liberated Jerusalem and, in stark contrast to the sheer barbarism of the crusaders, was tolerant and merciful to all.

Since the advent of Islam, Muslim leaders have been very generous in endowing *Bayt al-Muqaddas* with fine new buildings or in refurbishing and embellishing older ones. Both the *Qubbat as-Sakhra* ('Dome of the Rock') and the *Masjid al-Aqsa* were built during the first century *hijrah* by Umayyad caliphs from Damascus.

The city of Jerusalem is sacred to Muslims, Christians and Jews alike. It has a very ancient history and along with neighbouring Jericho (*Ariha*) to the east, may be one of the oldest continuously-inhabited regions on earth.

The walled city of Old Jerusalem today is dwarfed by the bustling, modern suburbs to the west. However, for centuries, the entire city was contained within its sturdy defence walls, the present ones dating from the time of the Ottoman sultan Sulayman (r. 1520-1566 CE). At the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Jerusalem was a tiny Byzantine outpost still trying to recover from the devastating massacre by the Persians in 614 CE. The two magnificent domed buildings one sees today within the walled city both date from the first century *hijrah*.

For Muslims, Jerusalem -- known in Arabic as *al-Quds al-Sharif* -- has a very special significance. It was the site of the first *qiblah*. Also, in about the year 620 CE, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was transported from the Ka'bah in Makkah to Jerusalem. His 'Night Journey' (*al-'Isra'*) continued when he ascended (*al-Mi'raj*) to the Seven Heavens, where he received the command to pray five times a day. And the Prophet ﷺ himself said in a well-known *hadith*: "Journeys should not be taken [with the intention of worship] except to three mosques: the Sacred Mosque in Makkah; my Mosque in Madinah; and *Masjid al-Aqsa* in Jerusalem."

In the year 638 CE, six years after the death of the Prophet ﷺ, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab رضي الله عنه, the second Caliph, entered Jerusalem which peacefully surrendered to him. The Byzantine Patriarch, Sophronius, offered 'Umar رضي الله عنه the keys to the city and then accepted the 'Umariyyah Covenant (*al-'Uhda al-'Umariyyah*) guaranteeing the rights of the non-Muslim inhabitants of Jerusalem. The Covenant begins ...

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Beneficent. This is what the servant of Allah, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, the *Amir* of the Believers, has offered the people of *Illyaa' al-Quds* (i.e. Jerusalem) of security granting them *amaan* (protection), for themselves, their money, their churches, their children, their lowly and their innocent, and the remainder of their people. Their churches are not to be taken; nor are they to be destroyed; nor are they to be degraded or belittled; neither are their crosses or their money; and they are not to be forced to change their religion; nor is any one of them to be harmed.



The *Qubbat as-Sakhra* (the 'Dome of the Rock') is a beautiful octagonal structure. Its gold covered dome covers the large rock from which the Prophet ﷺ began his *Mi'raj*. It is the first important building in the history of Islamic architecture.

Out of respect, ‘Umar ﷺ had entered Jerusalem on foot. He asked the Patriarch Sophronius to lead him to Mount Moriah, the site of the Prophet’s ﷺ *Mi’raj*. He was saddened to see the abhorrent condition of the mount which for centuries had been used as a garbage dump. ‘Umar ﷺ then started to clear the site with his own hands and with the help of hundreds of Muslims including many Companions ﷺ of the Prophet ﷺ, *al-Haram al-Sharif* (the ‘Noble Sanctuary’) was finally cleared of the accumulated debris of hundreds of years.

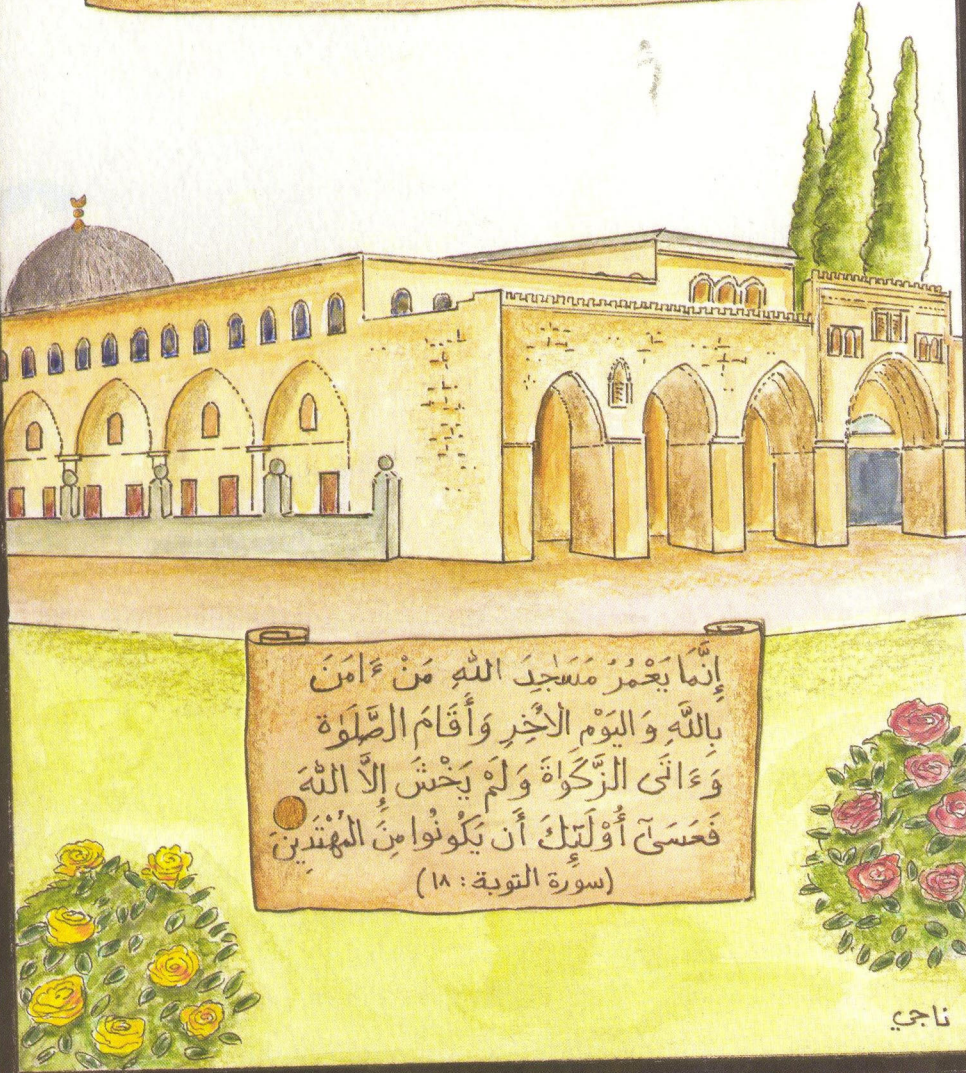
A temporary wooden mosque was soon constructed in the vicinity of the present-day *Masjid al-Aqsa*. Fifty years later, however, the fifth Umayyad caliph, ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, commissioned the building of the *Qubbat as-Sakhra* (the ‘Dome of the Rock’). This beautiful octagonal structure with its gold covered dome covers the large rock from which the Prophet ﷺ began his *Mi’raj*. Byzantine mosaicists were commissioned to decorate the interior with *ayahs* from the Noble Qur’an such as “Say not: ‘Three [trinity]!’ Cease! [it is] better for you” (*An-Nisa*: 171). It is the first important building in the history of Islamic architecture.

The hastily built wooden mosque of ‘Umar ﷺ was replaced by a much larger permanent structure commissioned by ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan. This was the first version of the Al-Aqsa Mosque as we know it today. It was completed by ‘Abd al-Malik’s son, al-Walid I, in 705 CE. Over the centuries, Al-Aqsa was severely damaged by three separate earthquakes and needed subsequent rebuilding. The present mosque dates from 1034-1036 CE, during the reign of the Fatimid caliph Al-Zahir.

Throughout history, Muslims, remembering the Prophet’s ﷺ *hadith*, have always longed to visit Al-Aqsa. And this was always possible except for the eighty-eight year long crusader occupation of Jerusalem in the 12th century CE. After the city’s liberation in 1187 CE and, indeed, right up until 1967, it was customary for pilgrims en route to Madinah and Makkah to make *ziyarah* there. But since 1967, it has been impossible for many Muslims to visit Al-Aqsa.

This book chronicles events in the illustrious history of Al-Aqsa and the *minbar* of Nur al-Din from which Allah’s praises were glorified before generations of Muslims. Today, the Al-Aqsa Mosque once again awaits liberation while groaning under a humiliating occupation.

سُبْحَنَ الَّذِي أَسْرَى بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِنَ
الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَا الَّذِي
بَرَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ مِنْ آيَاتِنَا إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ
الْبَصِيرُ (سورة الإسراء: ١٠)



إِنَّمَا يَعْمُرُ مَسْجِدَ اللَّهِ مَنْ ءَامَنَ
بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ
وَأَتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَلَمْ يَحْشَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ
فَعَسَىٰ أُولَٰئِكَ أَنْ يَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُهْتَدِينَ
(سورة التوبة: ١٨)

ناجي

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